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National Intelligence Council

NOTE FOR: Gaston Sigur  
Paul Wolfowitz  
Rich Armitage

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FROM: David Gries  
SUBJECT: What Does the Arhkipov Postponement Mean?

Most commentary has focused on why Arkhipov postponed his visit to Beijing. An equally relevant question is what postponement means for US interests.

In my view, the Soviets are signaling that they will not allow China to occupy the catbird's seat between Moscow and Washington, playing the two off against each other in circumstances controlled from Beijing. Moscow is unwilling to play this game.

Accordingly, Arkhipov's postponement--and any other future expressions of Soviet displeasure--can only strengthen the US position in East Asia by underscoring Sino-Soviet differences. In these circumstances, US-Chinese relations are likely to prosper, while Sino-Soviet relations may deteriorate, certainly in the short run.

In adopting the harder line toward Beijing symbolized by the postponement, Moscow may also be expressing frustration at its inability to halt the slow development of a northeast Asian tier of nations arrayed--but not allied--against Moscow.

  
David D. Gries

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